

ARTICLE 1, SECTION 8
ON PAGE 1-A

BALTIMORE SUN
26 March 1986

U.S. speeds military aid to Honduras

\$20 million granted to repel Sandinistas

By Nancy J. Schwerzler
Washington Bureau of The Sun

WASHINGTON — President Reagan dispatched \$20 million in emergency aid to Honduras yesterday and authorized U.S. helicopter pilots to ferry Honduran troops to a remote mountain area to repel what the administration called an "armed attack" by Nicaragua.

Administration officials, including Donald T. Regan, the White House chief of staff, assured members of Congress that U.S. military personnel would not enter any areas of fighting possibly involving the Honduran forces, Nicaraguan troops or the "contra" rebels whose base camps in Honduras were the target of the incursion.

"If we use our helicopters, yes, American pilots would fly but they would go nowhere near where the Nicaraguan troops are," Mr. Regan said after a meeting at the Capitol with Senate leaders.

White House spokesman Larry M. Speakes said U.S. forces currently in Honduras for military exercises were "not to be introduced into combat situations."

It was not explained how the pilots could move the troops to the combat areas without going into the areas.

The Honduras actions came as the Senate prepared to vote, most likely late tonight, on the Reagan administration's request for \$100 million in aid to the Nicaraguan contra rebels.

Senate Majority Leader Robert J. Dole, R-Kan., said that the events in Honduras had substantially improved the prospects for Senate approval of the aid request "pretty much in line with the president's wishes" and without major modifications.

At the White House, Mr. Speakes said that Mr. Reagan's actions came in response to a request by Honduran President Jose Azcona Hoyo Monday night for "urgent U.S. mili-

tary assistance to include assistance in airlifting Honduran troops as necessary." Mr. Speakes said the actions came in response to "the armed attack in the sovereign Honduran territory" by Nicaraguan forces.

Sen. David F. Durenberger, R-Minn., chairman of the Senate intelligence committee, said contra lead-

ers had told him that two groups of Sandinista forces crossed into Honduras Sunday, but that half fled back across the border into Nicaragua Monday.

About 850 Sandinista soldiers apparently were "trapped" inside Honduras yesterday, he said, and "some of them are going to get out; the question is whether some of them are going to get killed on the way out."

At the State Department, spokesman Charles E. Redman said Gen. John Galvin, commander in chief of the U.S. Southern Command, had been dispatched to Honduras to assess the situation and provide intelligence and advice to the Honduran government.

The military materiel that has been requested includes air defense weapons, conventional ordnance, spare parts and armament for helicopters and essential training, Mr. Redman said.

Sen. Richard G. Lugar, R-Ind., chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, said the \$20 million in aid to Honduras was "an acceleration of aid that Honduras had hoped to get" this year.

There was strong support yesterday for the president's actions in Honduras among House Democratic leaders, who nevertheless strongly oppose aid to the contra rebels.

"I am supporting the action of the president in this particular instance," said House Speaker Thom-

as P. O'Neill Jr., D-Mass., who engineered a House rejection of the president's \$100 million contra aid request last week. "This is an aggression by a nation into another nation and I am absolutely bitterly opposed to it; I think it is wrong," he said.

Mr. O'Neill said that the push into Honduras by Nicaraguan forces showed that Daniel Ortega, the Sandinista leader, was "a bumbling, incompetent Marxist-Leninist, communist."

House Majority Whip Thomas S. Foley, D-Wash., said that Mr. Ortega seemed "determined to create the role of international outlaw" and that "the Democratic Party would stand with the president in taking

action to repel" any actions by Nicaragua against its neighbors, such as Honduras.

However, there was some skepticism among Senate Democrats that the movement of Nicaraguan forces into Honduras was as large-scale as the administration maintained, and several opponents of contra aid suggested that the timing of the Honduras actions on the eve of a Senate vote might be more than coincidental.

"They've taken this [incursion] and are magnifying it and using this as the perfect excuse of why we must have these contras," said Sen. Christopher J. Dodd, D-Conn., an opponent of aid to the rebels.

"I think there very well could be a tie between the two, the vote on the contras and action in Honduras,"

said Sen. Paul Simon, D-Ill., adding that he suspected "the timing of this is not purely coincidental."

Mr. Durenberger, who has opposed military aid to the contras, said the events in Honduras were an outgrowth of an expanded U.S. role in the region. "What we are doing in Nicaragua has threatened the integrity of Honduras," he said.

In the past, Honduras has refused to acknowledge that contra forces operated from within its borders and has been reluctant to condemn previous Nicaraguan border crossings aimed at contra camps.

Both Mr. Redman at the State Department and Mr. Speakes at the White House emphasized that the Nicaraguan movements into Honduras came "within 48 hours" after the House rejected the president's contra aid request. However, the House is scheduled to reconsider the issue in mid-April.

Senate GOP leaders, who had earlier indicated a willingness to compromise on the contra aid request to win a large bipartisan vote, suggested yesterday that only minor changes would now be necessary.

"Whatever we have is going to pass" the Senate, Mr. Lugar said.

At the State Department, Mr. Redman said the Nicaraguan forces — which often have crossed the border into Honduras in the past, although in smaller numbers — had conducted four attacks on suspected contra bases about 10 miles north of the Nicaraguan-Honduran border.